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IZ, SG
SUBJECT: THIRD MEETING OF THE UN HIGH LEVEL GROUP OF THE
ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS CRITICIZES U.S. POLICY IN IRAQ
AND AFGHANISTAN

Classified By: Ambassador Janice L. Jacobs for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) SUMMARY: President Wade opened the third meeting of the 15-member UN High Level Group of the Alliance of Civilizations on May 28. Like Turkish Minister of State Aydin and former UNESCO Secretary General Mayor before him, Wade spoke of both economic and religious divisions, warning that the world is splitting into countries that have petroleum and countries that do not. Wade said the Islamic-Christian divide is growing wider, and he criticized human rights abusers who claim to be an example for others. Iqbal Riza, Special Advisor to the UN Secretary General (SYG), stated that Western-Muslim relations are marked by hostility and fear and declared that Western governments, actions in Palestine, Iraq and Chechnya have fanned Muslim extremism. The three-day gathering will also hear from the OECD Secretary General, the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) Director General, and the Mayor of The Hague. The High Level Group will debate approaches to creating employment, integrating immigrants, combating extremism and radicalism, promoting global and cross-cultural education, and using media to strengthen collaboration between the Muslim and Western Worlds. The Group will also recommend whether it should become a permanent UN institution. The High Level Group's final statement criticizes U.S. policy in Iraq and Afghanistan. The statement does, however, include an expression of concern about Iran's nuclear ambitions. END SUMMARY.

2. (U) On May 28, Turkish Minister of State Mehmet Aydin opened the third meeting of the UN High Level Group of the Alliance of Civilizations. Minister Aydin noted that it was appropriate that the meeting was taking place in Africa, the birthplace of civilization. He acknowledged that the continent faces many challenges, including unemployment, poverty, social injustice, women's inequality, and illiteracy. He hoped that unlike the second meeting in Doha, Qatar, which took place during the cartoon controversy, the third meeting would be able to focus on global conflict.

3. (U) Frederico Mayor, former UNESCO Director General and current President of the Culture of Peace Foundation, followed Aydin. Mayor focused on the injustice of the world economic system. Noting that Senegal's Goree Island is known worldwide because of the slave trade, Mayor suggested that today's economic system is a modern form of slavery with inequitable distribution of wealth. He stressed inclusion and peaceful resolution of conflicts.

4. (U) Iqbal Riza, Special Advisor to UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, spoke third and broadened the discussion by reminding the assembly, which included Senegalese officials, UN officials and members of the diplomatic corps, that nation states compete with media and non-state actors for influence in today's world. Riza stated that Western-Muslim relations are marked by hostility and fear. Riza declared that the actions of Western governments in Palestine, Iraq, Chechnya and elsewhere have fanned Muslim extremism. He acknowledged that genocide and religious violence as seen in Iraq, Northern Ireland, Rwanda, Somalia, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo generally remained within the borders of nation states. Riza challenged the High Level Group to find ways to defuse mutual hostility and mistrust. Before yielding the floor to Senegalese President Abdoulaye Wade,

who received UNESCO's Houphouet-Boigny Peace Prize in Paris two weeks ago, Riza noted that Senegal is an outstanding example of religious harmony and of respect for differences.

¶5. (U) For his part, President Wade urged the High Level Group to combat prejudice and misunderstanding. Wade opined that the gulf between the West and the Muslim World is growing wider, and he called upon the Alliance of Civilizations to endorse the Islamic-Christian Dialogue that is scheduled to take place following the Organization of the Islamic Conferences (OIC) Summit in Dakar. Wade noted that civilization existed before modern religions and that an alliance of civilizations is not an alliance of religions. He stressed that religion should not be used for political ends.

¶6. (U) Returning to Aydin and Mayor's economic themes, Wade declared that the price of oil is destroying countries that do not have petroleum. He suggested that people need to focus on achieving harmony with nature and with their environment rather than accumulating material wealth. In a slap at Western countries, Wade criticized nations that

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pretend to be points of reference and that try to impose a single global vision while violating human rights. He urged countries to demonstrate generosity, and he emphasized that education is critical for understanding and for development.

¶7. (U) Prior to the three-day Alliance meeting, the Ambassador and EmbOffs had the opportunity to meet with two of the three Americans on the High Level Group)- religious historian Karen Armstrong and Rabbi Arthur Schneier, President of the Appeal of Conscience Foundation. In fact, Rabbi Schneier and his party met representatives of Senegal's major Muslim brotherhoods at the EMR. For many of the Senegalese Muslims, it was the first time they had met a Jewish leader, and they had an excellent discussion about religious tolerance and human rights in Senegal, as well as the purpose of the Alliance of Civilizations. A third American, John Esposito, the Founding Director of Georgetown University's Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding and Editor-in-Chief of the Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World, was also slated to participate in the High Level Group's deliberations.

¶8. (U) The three Americans and their 12 non-American colleagues -) Aydin, Mayor, former Senegalese Prime Minister Moustapha Niasse, former French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine, former Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas, former Tunisian Education Minister Mohamed Charfi, South African Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Professor Pan Guang from the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, Ibero-American Secretary General Enrique Iglesias, Brazilian Rector of

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Candido Mendes University Candido Antonio Mendes de Almeida, Moscow State University professor Vitaly Naumkin, and Special Advisor to the UNSYG Nafis Sadik -- are slated to hear from Abdulaziz Othman Al-Tuwaijiri, the ISESCO Director General; Marc Perrin de Brichambaut, the Secretary General of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE); and Wim Deetman, the Mayor of The Hague. The deliberations are to recommend whether or not the High Level Group of the Alliance of Civilizations should become a permanent UN body. The 15 members will also debate approaches to creating employment, integrating immigrants, combating extremism and radicalism, promoting global and cross-cultural education, and using media to strengthen collaboration between the Muslim and Western Worlds.

¶9. (C) On May 29, Rabbi Schneier (strictly protect) told the Ambassador that the High Level Group's final declaration is critical of U.S. policy in Iraq and Afghanistan. Schneier added that he insisted that the statement take note of Iran's nuclear program, and he got it included but only after a lengthy debate in which the majority of members insisted that Iran is not an extremist country.

¶10. (C) COMMENT: The language about Iraq, Afghanistan, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and globalization is disappointing. President Wade and Mayor's remarks followed a week in which illegal emigration, especially to Spain, has dominated the local media. Hundreds of Senegalese seeking employment have been intercepted as they prepared to depart Senegal by boat, enter the Canary Islands by boat or enter

the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla on foot. END
COMMENT.
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